DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL MIKE WARD, CANADIAN FORCES, DEPUTY COMMANDER-POLICE, NATO TRAINING MISSION-AFGHANISTAN VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 12:12 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2010

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (U.S. Navy, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, April 8th, 2010. My name is MC2 William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs. And I will be moderating our call today.

A note to the bloggers online. Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point. Today, our guest is Major General Mike Ward, deputy commander-Police, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan.

And sir, without further ado, if you have an opening statement, you can go ahead with that now. GEN. WARD: Well, good evening. And thanks for holding the roundtable and giving us an opportunity to chat with people about some of the police development issues that we're understanding here at NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan.

I'm a Canadian officer who is General Caldwell's deputy for all issues that deal with police development and police institutional training. I've got about 35 years in the military, previous missions including Kosovo.

And like General Caldwell, I've spent a significant portion of my career in training institutions and thinking about ways to develop sophisticated either -- well, pretty much military forces but understanding the nature of how you develop leadership and how you develop people who are capable of performing roles like those that we see here in Afghanistan, in the midst of a counterinsurgency but also in the midst of a pretty fragile nation trying to refind itself.

So what I'd like to offer you tonight is the opportunity just to ask a bunch of questions about where we are, what we're doing. I would

offer right off the top of my head that certainly I think everyone's aware of how fragile the Afghan national police are.

They've probably got the worst reputation for a national institution in the country, the highest level of corruption.

But that, I would say, masks a number of positive indicators. We've undertaken or the minister of the Interior's undertaken a national police strategy, the first-ever document of its kind, in this -- in this circumstance, and they followed that up very recently with the first of a series of five one-year plans, the national police plan. So he's really gone on notice to identify where he wants to take the ministry and what qualifications and what qualities he expects the police to achieve during that time frame. And I'm happy to share with you any of those initiatives and where we intend to take them.

Do you want to go to the first question?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And Andrew, you were first on the line, so you can go ahead with your question.

Q Great. General Ward, good evening. Andrew Lubin here, Leatherneck Magazine. Appreciate you taking the time, sir.

GEN. WARD: Hi, Andrew.

Q General, you've got -- the Marines are training the ANPs and ANAs their way. Our Army trains it their way. Your Canadian soldiers train it the Canadian style. Is there one group that's doing better than the others, or are you going to try and standardize training, or you're going to just let everybody train them as they see fit?

GEN. WARD: (Laughs.) That's a great question. In fact I think it was one of the most significant challenges that NATO faced when they sat down at Strasbourg and Kehl last year, almost a year ago, to identify that there was an incredible need for one entity to come in and focus on the professional development of the Afghan national security forces, army and police.

And at that point in time -- not so much with the army, because the army was really always developed within a model that was heavily supported by CSTC-A -- but in the police, you've got just about every bilateral nation out here wanting to do it their way and not necessarily with a common reference point.

And one of the first things we've done with the arrival of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan is to create a very close relationship with the ministry, so that there's only one approach to training or there's one -- there's only one level of qualification that can be earned by any particular policeman, depending on whether he's a patrolman, an NCO or an officer. So the program of instruction approved by the ministry and then taught by everybody is really the start point.

Now there are bound to be differences in approach based on national psyches, but you know, generally speaking, we send validation/accreditation teams out just to make sure that people are adhering to the program of instruction and that they're doing their very best to train the patrolmen or the NCOs, the officers, to the level that's required here in the battlespace.

I have been down to the Marines in Leatherneck and was particularly impressed with the quality of the instruction, but even more so by the professionalism and the esprit that they showed. And that becomes infectious when you're dealing with a very young, very impressionable and -- individual, whether it's in Afghanistan, whether it's in Quantico, whether it's in Canada or elsewhere. I don't think there's any substitute for leadership and an approach to training that's been borne out by success and operations such as the Marine Corps has had ever since it was founded.

We're really trying to make sure that those lessons and those best practices are communicated across nations, so that our minimum baseline is a very effective patrolman who, while we probably haven't been able to give him enough training, is certainly ready for his first operational assignment and is capable of taking more training if he stays in the force, you know, past that first hitch.

Q Okay.

GEN. WARD: Over.

Q Emcee, can I follow up, since there's only two of us on the line?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Yes. Quick follow-up, yes.

Q Sir -- yeah, quick follow-up, then. Then -- and I've not had the pleasure of embedding with your troops, but I've spent a fair amount of time with the Army and the Marines. The biggest difference seems to be is the Marines get out there and live with the ANP and ANA; the Army does not. Are you able to standardize that? Or are you going to -- and that's a pretty major difference in, like you said, leadership and passing on the enthusiasm that some of the other forces don't seem to have.

GEN. WARD: The -- you know, the notion of embedded partnering is being introduced by the ISAF Joint Command with the intention of making sure that when you get to embedded partnering there's really only one standard, and that is, you have to live side by side. It's a 24/7 issue. And, you know, your job is really to create a warrior bond between you and your Afghan counterparts so that you're both effective and successful in operations.

The Marines have done it particularly well. I would say certainly there are Army units that have done it extremely well also, starting with Special Operations Command. I think, you know, as much as

the Marines, they've done it extremely successfully with people like the commandos and with some of the special units the Afghan National Army has produced, with really the arrival of General McChrystal, General Rodriguez, General Caldwell, just through this past year, this notion of getting much, much closer to the Afghans so that they're successful in the battle space is progressing.

You know, it'll probably take too long. It can never happen fast enough. But what the nations are learning who are out there on the ground alongside their Afghan counterparts actually cuts both ways. And I would speak from a Canadian perspective, because we've been providing OMLT to our partners, to 1st Brigade, 205th Corps in Kandahar for about four years.

And I've been down to see them in places like Sharif and Panjwayi. And when you get on the ground and you talk to a Canadian alongside his Afghan counterpart, if the model is successful, then, you know, the issue of nationality is almost invisible. If you've got people who respect each other, they're really committed to the same mission and they're really, you know, putting 150 percent into it -- as I've seen -- then what you get out of it is an extremely positive experience, in professional terms and warrior terms, by both sides. So, you know, this is really the high-water mark that we're trying to achieve here, and I think there's some positive indications.

I think the bigger challenge is, we just don't have enough of them. You know, if you could partner every ANA kandak that's out there, if you could partner every Afghan National Police unit that's out there, then we've seen a -- we believe we would see a quantum improvement in performance, in honesty, less corruption and, as we particularly measured in units like the ANA Commandos, extremely high retention rates and very low attrition rates. The kandaks -- or the commandos right now boast about a 95-percent retention rate and about a 5-percent attrition rate, which blows everybody else out of the water. You know, the U.S. Army can't match that; I'm sure the Marines can't; neither could we in the Canadian Army.

So, you know, I think the benefits are very clear. One of the ways we describe it is, if you're really going to help the Afghan institution and address the needs of the soldiers or the policemen, then you really have to do two things. You have to look after their personal welfare, and that includes things like -- we call them the three "Ps." The first "P" would be pay, but pay including a whole bunch of incentives, a whole bunch of quality-of-life initiatives that allow them to be, A, invested in, but also feel they're being appreciated when they're taking on the tough tasks.

The second one would be the partnering that I've just spoken about, and the third one is to introduce a predictable cycle of operations, rest and reset and training. And that has not been widely implemented, certainly not in the police, and we're endeavoring to do that within the next couple weeks.

Q Great, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And we can go on to Dennis (sp).

Q Hello, sir. This is Dennis Noll (sp) of Bouhammer.com.

GEN. WARD: Hi, Dennis (sp).

Q I was an ETT, embedded technical trainer, at FOB Tillman, Paktika province, back in 2006, 2007 with the ANA. And at times I was -- I was tasked to have the ANP tag along with me. And one of the biggest issues -- obviously throughout the whole country, but obviously in the -- definitely in the security forces, was the literacy rates, the lack of. I see this --

GEN. WARD: Absolutely.

Q Yes. And the literacy training has been incorporated in all of NATO's Afghan security force training programs. What steps have been taken to implement this plan to improve the literacy training?

GEN. WARD: Well, as of about mid-March, literacy training became mandatory for both the army and police for all basic training. And if you accept -- and as I'm sure you know, the literacy rate across the population's about 14 percent, across the security forces about 14 percent. And the biggest gap is really in the young NCOs and the -- and the policemen.

And the literacy program's going to achieve two things. One is, it's a tremendous recruiting tool, because we're recruiting from a lost generation of Afghans who, through all the troubles of the last 20, 30 years, have not had the wherewithal to gain the education that we're giving to 5-,6-,7-,8-year-olds rights now. And if we don't invest in this generation, then we'll actually be perpetuating instability into the future.

You know, I saw it in my own army when I was a young officer. We'd come out of the generation of the '60s and '70s, where, you know, a lot of our NCOs -- and I think the U.S. military was the same -- a lot of our NCOs had achieved some elements of secondary school but certainly didn't have the same type of education as not only the young officers, but young soldiers.

And you had a lot of instability and you had a lot of intergenerational stress because the NCOs were expert at their jobs, but they were, I think, feeling some self-esteem problem. We don't want to revisit this on the Afghans, and of course, they've got a lot further to go.

Now, what we've calculated is, to get somebody from a zero level of literacy to about the third or fourth grade, which is a reasonable level of effectiveness for military or police skills, takes about 350 hours. In the basic training, we're only able to offer about 60 hours, but it's a start point.

So when all those patrolmen and soldiers come out of the training base and they go to their first units, there's a follow-on program that provides continuing education that will allow them, through literacy instructors -- that are often ex-policemen or ex-military -- to get them to higher and higher levels.

And so far, the results are very encouraging. I was down in Tarin Kowt about three weeks ago, where, at a Dutch training facility, they had finished the day's training and they were going into two hours of literacy training. And it just so happened that the program director for this was a female -- a woman Afghan from Kabul happened to be there the same day checking up on the program, so we had the opportunity to sit down in a tent and for me to ask her what she thought objectively was going on, or whether she supported what we were doing and whether it was going to pay off.

And she was extremely excited about the way it was going, and she was really looking at it from the students' perspective and how motivated they were to go to the training.

So I think it's a very positive indication. If we can get past the level of illiteracy, we'll be able to do much more sophisticated things with both the military and the police, and I think that's in their future.

I think it's just a great commitment for a nation to make. And, you know, as a Canadian or as an economist, I think there are really only two things that a nation ought to do for its citizens, and one is to just continue to invest in that sort of human capital, which is to continue to develop the intellectual capacity of all your citizens and equally to invest in -- and you may disagree with me on this one -- invest in their health and welfare.

And, you know, I think we may never have seen an Einstein come out of Germany without programs like that. Equally, who knows who the next president of the United States is going to be. But that's a tangent we could probably explore some other time.

Over.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Yes. Thank you, sir. And on to Christine.

Q Hi, I'm Christine Spolar. I'm with The Huffington Post Investigative Fund.

General, I cover a lot of the hearings on Capitol Hill, where there were real concerns about the existing police contract that is now with the State Department and that was to be taken over by the DOD and there's been a protest that was raised by DynCorp, which is currently your partner of training the police there; and that the new contract was supposed to be going through the CNTPO, and DynCorp was going to be taken out of the contract bid because of just the mechanics of it.

DynCorp protested. Now the State contract has been extended until July. It was supposed to end in January. I'm hearing it's going to be extended again until December; perhaps you know that, if you can confirm that.

I'm just wondering. The DynCorp contract was to put beat cops on the beat.

The big discussion in Washington and the big impetus and push from the Obama administration was, we don't want them to be police; they need to be paramilitary. And that was based on the U.S. Defense Department push last year.

So with the current contract, one, do you know what is happening with that? And has that been extended? And do you have any idea what's happening with the bid process? Because I know these things take a very long time.

And two, are the soldiers being trained as was envisioned, as a paramilitary force now, with real strategic training? Because there was also an inspector-general report -- in the last two months, I guess, or three months -- saying that was absolutely necessary, for it to be turned over to DOD with different skills.

I know it's a lot of questions. But it's kind of in a logical form.

GEN. WARD: Sure, let me take it.

The issue of the contract is really outside my lane. Because it's a U.S. government contract, it's really being taken care of by our programs section, which is really U.S. to U.S.

But to the best of my knowledge, we're still working on the July 31st extension, at this point in time, and then looking at what new type of contract vehicle would be explored.

And you know, there are probably a variety of different ones. You could potentially go for a sole-source. But I don't think that would be supported in America any more than it would be in Canada under these circumstances.

So it's probably likely that we'll go to a full and open competition. And what that would introduce would be, you know, a fairly lengthy process. And therefore we would need to either extend the current contract or break it into pieces and look at a couple of different aspects.

And I'm sorry, that's about as far as I understand the process at this point in time.

What we have tried to do is to adjust the scope, or the statement of work for the contract, even with the current DynCorp employees, so that we can -- we can extend their reach further out into

the battlespace. Now, the current model that we work with sees our DynCorp or our contracting instructors working through I&L, mentoring and advising Afghan instructors who actually deliver the training. And that's actually a pretty good model. Training the trainer is one of the key aspects of transition, and will ensure that we achieve a level of sustainability with the Afghans that will allow us to accelerate our departure.

But at this period of really high-pressure growth in the police, we just don't have enough instructors of any color -- Afghan, police or military. And we need to put all those instructions on the line. So we want to adjust the statement of work so that we can do that.

We'd like to adjust the statement of work so that more of those police could go out into the battlefield, or into the districts and regions, so that they can help mentor Afghans in their districts, the Afghan commanders, and therefore improve the quality and professionalism of the policing out there.

On the -- on the issue of whether we want beat cops or we want paramilitary police, what we would prefer is to identify somebody who is not only a law-enforcement professional, but somebody who's really got experience in complex conflict areas, like we see here in Afghanistan, in a variety of hot spots around the world. Iraq's certainly like that, but you find it in the Middle East and in Africa as well.

And that's because the type of policing the Afghans need at this point in time is fit for the security conditions you find here and likely the security conditions that we'll see through the next perhaps 10 to 15 years. And that calls for a policeman who first and foremost knows how to defend himself and he's confident in his self-protection skills. That allows him to become a much better deterrent in the community and ultimately to be able to execute his law enforcement responsibilities.

So there's a complex combination of skill sets that we need to build in to even the most basic patrolman that's going out there. So the program of instruction that we've developed really does focus on some of those basics that, whether it's a policeman or it's a soldier in Afghanistan, it's probably the same guy.

And if you speak to policemen out in places like Kandahar or Helmand, they're interested in the professionalization side of it, which is to say knowing how to be a better policeman. But they'll tell you right off the bat that the most important thing they do every day is survive. And whether it's at their checkpoint or on patrol, or when they have to protect the public, then they really need to have those skill sets.

Now, the fundamental issue around the police is that -- we get a lot of criticism from some parties about the program of instruction, but we take care to make sure that all of the programs of instruction, the courses, are vetted and they're cross-checked by a lot of policemen from the international community. We've got some very good representatives from coalition and NATO allies here. And then it's ultimately -- because

INL holds the contract, its for them to approve any changes to the POI at this point in time.

So far we've done pretty well with that. If we were able to move the contract over to DOD, then it just shortens that chain of approval that has cost us some disruption in the past.

Q If I could follow up, what are they not getting now that you would prefer them to have?

And I understand, you know, in Iraq, they had 12 weeks of training. There was great discussion in December, in Washington, why Afghan police were only getting eight weeks when the Iraq police got 12 weeks. And then as I understand it's been cut to six weeks.

GEN. WARD: (Laughs.)

Q So in this six weeks time, and I understand, I understand there's pressure to have the turnaround.

But in this six weeks time, what are you able to give them now? But if it was under DOD, how else would they be benefitting?

GEN. WARD: Let me take it from the far end.

What we have initiated this year in the training of the Afghan national police is a brand new model whereby everybody who comes into the force is recruited. They're sent to a training center. And then only once they've qualified do they go off to their first duty assignments.

Up until this year, it was only in the Afghan national civil order police that they had that model. And that's a small segment of the force.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. WARD: We were virtually sending policemen -- sorry.

Q What did they do before?

GEN. WARD: Well, what would happen was, the entire recruiting system was very local. District commanders could recruit their own up to a tashkeel limit. But there was no training system to qualify them for their first jobs. And so they wouldn't get any formal training.

You might get about two weeks of orientation but not according to a program instruction. So you know, the vast bulk of those policemen, through the past series of years, have gone out into their first jobs without any proper qualifications at all.

That's why we introduced in 2007 a focused district development program, to try and begin the reform of those police, by training them after the fact. That's very expensive in time and resources. And it's like chasing a runaway train really. What we have realized is that

there's only one way to do it right, and that's to start from scratch and train everybody as they come in.

Now, we've done that for the young officers (as ?) they come through the police academy. We haven't done it much for NCOs. And we weren't doing it all for patrolmen. And so at this point in time, after about eight years of trying to reform and grow the police relatively incrementally, we can't confirm that we've trained any more than about 45 percent of them for what they're doing. And that's mostly at the patrolmen level.

And there's a real lack of professional development through the NCO ranks and beyond into the officer ranks. So we're really fundamentally introducing a comprehensive system of professional development this year that will include staff colleges, additional skills training at the NCO ranks, specialist skills in EOD and counter-IED, in logistics and a whole bunch of other things to really try and transform the broad part of the force.

Now, we're constrained in doing that by a training system that's insufficient for that type of model. And so we've had to make some tough choices. What we have committed to not doing is, we're not going to cut training. What we had to do, however, in order to free up space for more people to get basic training, and to get their leadership development, was to compress some of the training. So in that patrolmen course, which used to be delivered in eight weeks, we're delivering exactly the same course in six weeks, albeit through an extended training day. And at the same time, we've added in those 64 hours of literacy, which equates to about an hour and a half, two hours a day.

So it's a little more stressful in terms of a training environment. It would approximate what our own recruits go through in the U.S. military, the Canadian military. But it's guaranteed that we can meet the throughput requirements of a force that also have an extremely high attrition rate.

So we're trying to attack the problem through a rule set that says, first of all, everybody's going to get training this year. And we're going to make sure that we focus on leader development, which is to make sure that all of those commanders, whether they're at company level, battalion/kandak level, brigade level or at province, district, region, will all get some element of seminar or professional qualification this year, because that's -- that's actually the high payoff target.

If we were only to focus on the patrolmen, we'd still be sending them back into assignments where their leadership is not qualified, may not be effective and may be -- may be entirely corrupt. And we believe that those are the main factors around the very high AWOL rate, the high attrition rate and the high casualty rate. And we really need to turn that around.

So if you could focus on sort of the big picture, you'll see a tremendous amount of training being done this year, all with a view to

making sure that people are effective at the first assignment and then, if they stay in the force, we'll continue to invest them.

Over.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And with that, I think we're going to have to go ahead and begin to start to wrap things up. And I want to thank all the bloggers for your questions today and thank you, sir, for your comments.

As we do wrap up today's call, Major General Ward, do you have any final comments that you'd like to say?

GEN. WARD: Let me just say thank you very much for your interest in what it is we're doing out here. And I would offer to follow up with any of you one on one after this, if you like. But you know, we've got -- we've got information we'd be very happy to share with you.

And as a lot of these events progress, and we're going to hit some milestones around which, you know, we'll be -- some of our leaders, General Caldwell, for sure, will be testifying or certainly reporting to the National Security Council -- we think it's important that you get that information as well and that you share it with your readers. And so, you know, the ability for us to continue to communicate is very important. So with that, what I can do is make sure that you've got my coordinates. And if you're interested in more information, we'll certainly flow that to you.

Over.

Q Great, thanks. General, can we contact you through Stephanie (sp) Ward -- through Major -- excuse me -- through Major Bounds (sp)?

MS. : General Ward, (I definitely am ?).

GEN. WARD: I'm sorry?

Q Can we contact you through Major Bounds (sp)? Is she -- is she the --

(Cross talk.)

GEN. WARD: Yes, absolutely.

Q Great. Thank you, then.

GEN. WARD: She sure is. Yeah.

Q Can I ask one last question about how short of you -- are you of trainers now? You were saying that you have not enough. How many are we short still?

GEN. WARD: Well, we calculated that in order to run the training effectively, and to be able to focus on professionalizing the Afghan National Police, we needed about 600 instructors, international police instructors, across the 27 to 30 training centers that we have. So far we have offers of about 400, if you include the ILN-contracted police instructors that we already have on the books.

So we're still short by well over 200, and that does cause us some concern, because General Caldwell's commitment is quality and quantity, in that order. And we don't want to miss the opportunity to make sure that these people are well-trained and they're safe and they're -- the Afghan people are proud of them because they've been trained properly. Over.

Q Why are they short? Why -- (off mike)?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: We're actually -- I'm sorry, we're just short of time. But I -- yeah. So sorry about that. Ma'am, you can forward me your question.

Q Sure, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And I'll forward to the public affairs.

And today's program will be available online at the Bloggers Roundtable link on dodlive.mil, where you'll be able to access the story based on today's call, along with source documents such as bios, the audio file and print transcripts.

Again, thank you, sir, and our bloggers who participated today. This concludes our call.

Q Thank you very much.

Q General --

GEN. WARD (?): Thank you very much. Appreciate the time.

Q Thank you. Great.

Q General, appreciate it.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

END.